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CHRESTOS:

A RELIGIOUS EPITHET;

ITS IMPORT AND INFLUENCE.



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BY

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PREFACE.

THIS brief essay, recently offered as a sessional paper to the Society of Biblical Archæology, was declined by the Council.

When, some four-and-twenty years ago, Mr. (now Sir Henry) Layard, the traveller and great pioneer of Assyrian archæology, on a certain public occasion, was presented to the Town Council of a northern borough by a prominent citizen, the principal credential adduced for him by his introducer was, that he had "done so much for the Bible."

To do as much as possible for the Bible, from an orthodox point of view, would seem to be considered the primary purpose of the Society of Biblical Archæology. Whether that motive be consistent with the true principles of Biblical archæology, as a science, appears to the writer to be open to question.

J. B. M.

PARIS, March 31, 1880.

CHRESTOS:

A RELIGIOUS EPITHET;

ITS IMPORT AND INFLUENCE.

AMONG the arguments whereby the early Christians sought to justify themselves, in the eyes of their Pagan fellow citizens, for their religious faith, there was one, drawn from the meaning of the name they were called by, which would seem to have been greatly relied on. As might be expected it had a very prominent place in the kind of composition styled Apology, which was a sort of pleading addressed nominally, at least, to the Roman authorities; but it is met with in treatises having a different scope. To us more fully-cultured moderns, it is

true, this argument would have very little weight, and might perhaps irreverently be likened to a pun. But when we consider the extent to which the logical method of the Jewish *agadists* was in use among the Patristic writers, we need not hesitate to admit that it was reckoned an argument of great force, and was found to be extremely effective. The method of the agadists, which the Jews regarded as highly laudable and rational, and to which they gave the name of *midrasch*, was by no means unknown to other sections of society in the Roman world, being in fact a kind of reasoning whereto the literate classes in uninstructed populations are particularly prone. By it remote and fantastic analogies, metaphors taken literally, ambiguities of all sorts, punning included, took the place of accurate ratiocination. What has been called "the doctrine of signatures," whereby likeness in the shape

of a body to some portion of the human frame was taken for proof of its influence over such member or organ as the case might be, and which was at one time universally accepted in Europe and has hardly yet died out in certain parts, was a survival of this logic of ignorance. But among Patristic and ecclesiastical writers, whose thoughts were chiefly turned to and guided by Scripture, agadic analogy most frequently took the form of verbal ambiguity.

Between the words *Χριστός* and *Χρηστός*, when uttered according to the ancient way of pronouncing, there was little if any perceptible difference. The former signified "anointed," the latter "good, excellent, gracious." It was consequently by the agadic method evident that he who was anointed (Christ) was good and gracious (Chrest); and that that which the name Christian covered was good, excellent, and in truth really Chres-

tian. This argument is stated in at least five of the most eminent of the Church Fathers, embracing a period of 250 years at least. The importance which was attached to it is evidenced by the circumstance that it is used even by the Latin Fathers, notwithstanding that, in the language wherein they wrote, the pun could not be expressed nor the ambiguity perceived without reference to the Greek. Nevertheless, to such an extent had this analogy become a stock argument that both Lactantius and Jerome have taken advantage of it.

In his Apology written about the middle of the second century and addressed to the Emperor Antoninus Pius, Justin, called the Martyr, states it briefly and pithily :

“Χριστιανοὶ γὰρ εἶναι κατηγορούμεθα
τὸ δὲ χρηστὸν μισεῖσθαι οὐ δίκαιον.”
(Apol. i., 4.)

Clement of Alexandria, in “*Stromata*”

composed towards the end of the second century, has it thus :

“Αὐτίκα οἱ εἰς χριστὸν πεπιστεύκοτες
χρηστοὶ τέ εἰσὶ καὶ λέγονται.” (Strom.
ii., 4.)

In Tertullian's “*Supplicatio*,” dating about the commencement of the third century, it is put as follows :*

“Etiam cum corrupta a vobis *Christiani* pronunciamur (nam ne nominis quidem ipsius liquido certi estis) sic quoque de suavitate vel *bonitate* modulatum est.” (Ad Nat. 3.)

Lactantius (circ. 316 A.D.) makes the following allusion to it :

“Sed exponenda hujus nominis ratio

* In his more elaborate “*Apologeticus*,” Tertullian repeats this argument in somewhat different words :—“Christianus vero, quantum interpretatio est de unctione deducitur. Sed et cum perperam aut Christianus pronunciat a vobis (nam nec nominis certa est notitia penes vos), de suavitate vel benignitate compositum est.” (Contr. Gent. 3.)

est propter ignorantium errorem qui eum immutata littera *Chrestum* solent dicere." (Div. Inst. iv., 7, 5.)

Jerome (circ. 392 A.D.) uses the argument in this manner :

" Quia apud Græcos *χρηστοίτες* utrumque sonat. Virtus est lenis, blanda, tranquilla et omnium *bonorum* consortis." (In Gal. v., 22.)

It is clear from those passages that the Christians were accustomed to get the credit of being good and gracious because the word *Χριστός* when uttered had the same pronunciation as *Χρηστός*; but it may also be inferred from them that it was a very usual thing to write the words Christ and Christian with *η* in place of *ι*.

Reference to ancient Christian epigraphy shows this inference to be correct and proves that such was the fact. Careful search through the Christian inscriptions, numbering 1,287, in the

fourth volume of Bœckh's "Corpus Inscriptionum," published in 1877, fails to discover a single instance of earlier date than the third century, wherein the word Christ is not written Chrest or else Chreist. The two earliest of all the Christian inscriptions of known date are those which are numbered respectively 9,727 and 9,288; in the former the name occurs in the form of ΧΡΗΣΤΟΤΣ, in the latter in that of ΧΡΕΙCΤΕ. The word Christian written in full is found in only twelve instances, but although these extend to very late ages, in one-third the spelling is with *η*. The numbers borne by the four inscriptions in question are: add. 2,883 d; 3,857 g; 3,857 p; 9,481, the word occurring with the latter spelling twice in 3,857 p. In connection with the latter inscription the editor of the "Corpus Inscriptionum" makes the following note: "Cæterum h.l. observabilus nominum *χρηστιανοὶ χρηστῶ*.

Quod at tempus attinet n. 3,865 l. docet denominationem illam in hoc tractu sæculo tertio obtinuisse."

The admirable indices to Bœckh's great work, which afford the means of arriving at the above result with so much certainty, on being further questioned, reveal that which in all probability greatly conduced to the confusion between the two words. In a spiritual or mystic sense the word *Χρηστός* was one of the epithets applied to the departed in the sepulchral epigraphy of the Greeks in all ages, pre-Christian as well as post-Christian, and as such is found constantly recurring in the "Corpus Inscriptionum." There are thirty-two instances to be counted in the index, and several more have been met with since the publication of Bœckh's text.

It was more especially in the epitaphs which were inscribed on the kind of monument styled *ἡρώων* that the word

Χρηστός was used, the most common combination being the invocation ΗΡΩΣ ΧΡΗΣΤΕ ΧΑΙΡΕ. The ἥρωοι χρηστοὶ were in fact the saved or redeemed souls, the Pagan saints.*

Fully to understand what was meant by the use of the expression *χρηστός* applied to the departed, it is necessary to call to mind that it constituted the distinctive title of the divinities who ruled the next world, and in particular of Ἅδης or Pluto, King of Hades and Judge of Souls; and that the same title was conferred on those who left his

* It is a remarkable circumstance that the epigraphy of Attica has as yet furnished no instance of the sepulchral formulas *χρηστή χαίρει* and *χρηστὲ χαίρει*, elsewhere so common. Might it be possible that what gave rise to this peculiarity had something to do with the obduracy displayed by the Athenians to the preaching of Paul and their notorious backwardness in receiving the Gospel? ("Antiquités helléniques," par Alexander Rhizos Rhankabes; Athènes, 1855.)

awful tribunal justified, and who then became οἱ Χρηστοί, "the good" *par excellence*. The solemn title of Χρηστός, Bonus, was not given to any other divinity, but only to the fate-disposing pair, Ἄδης and Περσεφόνη, and the ubiquitous mystic Ἐρμῆς, and sometimes, as by courtesy, to their subordinates. When it occurs associated with any other divine name, as for instance in the very common Latin inscription "BONUS DEUS BRONTO," all that is implied is that the mystic God was invoked under a local name, in the way in which Roman Catholics invoke the Virgin under a great variety of surnames, as it were. So fundamental was the connection between the epithet "good, excellent" and the Gods of the other world that, according to Garucci, it can be traced in the ancient Italic name of Pluto, Summanus, Manus being, in the old Latin idiom, a version of Χρηστός; and the

same observation would no doubt apply to the Dii Manes in general, who were invoked on every Roman tomb. ("Les Mystères du Synchrétisme Phrygien," par Raphael Garucci, S.J., p. 31; Paris, 1854.)

Certain wall-paintings discovered in Herculaneum, and the inscriptions relating to the Fratres Arvales, have familiarised those versed in classical archæology with the epithets "Bona Dea" and "Bonum Fatum" as distinctive titles of Persephone. ("Herculan.," T.V. Pitture, p. 263, n. 2. Marini: "Att. e Mon. Frat. Arv.," p. 235; Rom., 1795.)

Among the catacombs of Rome there are some which contain purely Jewish tombs, and others wherein are found Pagan subjects and inscriptions in complete contrast with the Christian tombs forming the great bulk of the catacomb monuments. Of the latter the most remarkable are the three arcosalia in

the catacombs of Prætextatus, situated almost underneath the very ancient church of Domine quo Vadis. The arched recess which in each surmounts the stone coffin is ornamented with well-preserved mystic paintings representing the departure of the soul to Hades, its judgment there, and subsequent introduction into the gardens of the blessed, where it is represented partaking of the celestial banquet with others of the justified. The superscription of the latter scene is: BONORUM IUDICIO IUDICATI. (Perret: "Les Catacombes de Rome," t. i., pl. lxx.)

Of the specially mystic character of the divine title "the good," direct evidence is afforded by a passage of Macrobius, which states that, according to Cassius Hemina, the Gods of the Samothracian mysteries were styled Θεοὶ Χρηστοὶ; and that the title was of truly ancient usage may be gathered from

what Cicero has related of certain engraved silver tablets which were in the Greek temples: "Mensas argenteas in quibus quod more veteris Græciæ inscriptum esset BONORUM DEORUM." (Macrob. "Saturnal.," iii., 4; Cic. "De Nat. Deor.," xxxiv., 83.)

But it was in Egypt that the part played by this epithet was most prominent. There the whole land was full of the worship of the Good God, Hesir-Onnofri, King of Kar-neter (Hades) and Judge of Souls; and hardly was there to be found an inscribed tomb of any importance without his name and distinctive title of the Good, the Excellent, the Gracious, expressed by the sign $\dagger$. Thanks to Champollion and his many eminent successors, nothing is more certain in the whole range of Egyptology than the consecration to Osiris, in his mystic character of Ruler in the realm of the departed and Judge

of Souls, of the special title of the Good, *BONUS*, *XPHΣΤΟΣ*. Even before the art of deciphering the hieroglyphical characters had been acquired, this could be made out from Plutarch's treatise "*De Iside et Osiride*." It is therein stated that "Osiris was the Good Deity, the beneficent king, who was able to conquer the world by persuasion alone" ("*De Is. et Os.*," xiii.); and again: "Osiris and Isis were the Good Divinities" (*Ibid.*, xxviii.). That *Χρηστός* was the conventional as well as the accurate rendering of the Egyptian *nofri* term, as applied to Isis and Osiris, we have evidence in an inscription published by Bœckh, and beginning *ΙΣΙΔΙ ΧΡΗΣΤΗ*. ("*Corp. Inscr.*," t. ii., p. 245, n. 2,300.)

No one has better described the career of Osiris in his special character of the Good God, *Θεὸς Χρηστός*, than Wilkinson, whose sobriety of judgment cannot be questioned. "Osiris," he says, "was

called the manifester of Good, and said to be full of Goodness (grace) and Truth. He appeared on earth to benefit mankind; and after having performed the duties he had come to fulfill, and fallen a sacrifice to Typho, the evil principle, he 'rose again to a new life' (Plut. "De Is. et Os.," xxxv.) and became the Judge of Mankind in a future state. The dead also, after having passed their final ordeal and been absolved from sin, obtained in his name, which they then took, the blessings of eternal felicity." That is to say, the justified took the name of *Χρηστοί*. ("Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians," by Sir Gardner Wilkinson, vol. iii., p. 69; Lond., 1878.)

There is reason to think that Onnofri was not only the distinctive official title, so to speak, of Osiris, but also the vulgar name by which he was commonly called and under which he figured in the

Egyptian calendar. The Christmas Day of Egypt, that is the religious festival which marked the end of one year and the opening of the next, was the anniversary of the birth of Osiris, the first day of the $5\frac{1}{4}$ -day epact which was intercalated between the first and the last of their twelve 30-day months. It was calculated to fall at the period of the summer solstice, and practically coincided, so far as agronomical requirements were concerned, with the commencement of the Nile inundation, being in fact the day that has been appropriated to John Baptist in the Roman calendar. But in the calendars of the Coptic and Greek churches this day is the festival of Saint Onnofrios, a personage in whom, it can hardly be doubted, is to be recognised the Osirian Onnofri. It is somewhat remarkable that the saint who, in the Roman calendar, has Onnofri's day, is

precisely one whose connection with Christianity is referrible to the fluviatile immersion or aspersion wherewith he is said to have consecrated Jesus.

It is not difficult to divine what must have been the influence of this universally recognised significance of the title *Χρηστός* on Pagan society, familiar as it was, in one form or another, with the eschatological doctrines of the ancient religions, when the *Χριστός* of the Gospel was presented to them. That this eschatology was well known not only to the Pagans but also to the section of Jewish society which furnished the earliest adherents to Christianity, may be considered almost a matter of course. But we are not without evidence of a direct kind that this was the case; for Chapter xii. of the Book of the Apocalypse reads like a paragraph of Plutarch's treatise "*De Iside et Osiride*," and the latter portion of Chapter xxv. of the

Gospel according to Matthew like a passage from the Egyptian Book of the Dead.

The Book of the Dead or of the Departure, a copy of which was placed in every coffin, contained the things necessary for salvation and requisite to be known to every one on entering on his justification before the dread tribunal installed in the Hall of Truth. Here sat the two-and-forty assessors or elders (Apoc. iv., 4) presided over by Hesir-Onnofri (Osiris Χρηστός) in his character of King of Kar-neter (Matth. xxv., 34, 40), clothed in a white or glistening robe and seated on his throne (Matth. xxv., 31; Apoc. iv., 4), before which were placed the four genii having severally the head of jackal, ape, man, and hawk or eagle (Apoc. iv., 6), and the recording angel Tot (the Word) with his book of "the things done in the body" (Apoc. v., 2, 7; x., 2, 9, 10; 2 Cor. v., 10). Ad-

dressing himself in succession to each of his judges, the defunct was required for his justification to declare that he had not committed such and such a sin. "I have not blasphemed (taken the name of the Lord in vain)," he was expected to say; "I have not cheated; I have not stolen; I have not caused strife; I have treated no one with cruelty; I have occasioned no disorders; I have not been an idler; I have not been given to drunkenness; I have given no unjust orders; I have not been indiscreet through idle curiosity; I have not indulged in vain talk nor in evil speaking; I have used violence to no one; I have caused no one to fear unjustly; I have not been envious; I have never spoken evil of the king nor of my parents; I have not brought any false accusation." Besides such negative pleas advanced by the defunct in favour of his innocence, there were others of a positive

kind. "I have made the requisite offerings to the Gods; for the love of God I have given food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, clothing to the naked, and shelter to the destitute."—Matth. xxv., 42-44. ("Das Todenbuch des Egypter," von K. R. Lepsius; Leipzig, 1842. "Ritual of the Dead," by Samuel Birch; Appendix to Bunsen's "Egypt's Place in History," vol. vi., pp. 125-333; Lond., 1867. "Le Rituel Funéraire de l'Egypte," par Charles Lenormant, pp. 9-11; Paris, 1862.

It is by no means improbable that, in the circumstance of Osiris having been styled *χρηστός*, we have the explanation of the passage relating to the worship of Serapis at Alexandria which is contained in the letter addressed by the Emperor Adrian (circ. A.D. 134) to his son-in-law Servianus, whereof the Latin biographer, Flavius Vopiscus, in his life of the Consul and quasi-Emperor Saturninus,

has given a copy from the writings of Phlegon, Adrian's freedman.* In connection with the superstitions of the Alexandrians, it is therein stated that the worshippers of Serapis were Christians—*"illic qui Serapem colunt Christiani sunt, et devoti sunt Serapi qui se Christi episcopos dicunt."* But Serapis was Osiris under another and more modern name ;

* "*Adriani epistolam ponam ex libris Phlegontis liberti ejus proditam.*"—Vopisc. Hist. Aug. Vit., Sat. 7.

Few men of antiquity were better acquainted with Egypt than the Emperor Adrian. In the course of his prolonged travels throughout the empire, which occupied fifteen years, he had resided a considerable time in that country, Nothing is more authentically recorded than Adrian's residence in Egypt ; for there still subsist at Thebes, engraven on the statue of Amenoph III., called by the classical writers the vocal Memnon, and on its base, no fewer than twenty-seven dated inscriptions by members of his court and suite, testifying to the hearing by them, as well as by Adrian and his Empress, Sabina, of the mysterious sounds which

and under each he was the consort of Isis, to whom we have above seen the epithet *χρηστή* applied in an inscription. This statement, which has always appeared so inexplicable, was evidently due to the confounding of the word *χρηστός* with *χριστός*.

What perhaps tended to confirm this confusion was the crucial form of the *nofri* (*χρηστός*) sign †, which has all

proceeded from the statue when the rays of the morning sun fell upon it. Those inscriptions have been collected and commented on by the learned Letronne. Some are verses of considerable elegance, six being due to Balbilla, a gifted Roman lady, whose poetical talent was probably appreciated and encouraged by Adrian, who himself was a successful versifier, as his celebrated lines, *Adriani Morientis ad Animam*, testify:—" *Animula, vagula, blandula*," &c. There is every reason to think that Phlegon may even have been actually in Egypt with Adrian. ("Recueil des Inscriptions grecques et latines de l'Egypte," par J. A. Letronne, t. ii., pp. 316-419; Paris, 1842.)

the appearance of a cross placed on an elevation, such as Calvary by tradition is represented to have been. The peculiar spiritual significance of the divine cross of Egypt, the *crux ansata* , namely "life eternal," in all probability likewise contributed thereto; for we learn from the "Ecclesiastical History" of Socrates of Byzantium (lib. v., c. 17), as well as from the parallel work of Sozomenes (lib. ii., c. 15), that this emblem occupied a prominent place in the temple of Serapis at Alexandria, where it was claimed alike by Pagans and Christians, and that it signified, as is well known indeed from other sources, "the life to come,"—ζῶον ἐπερχόμενην.

The classes of society wherein the influence in question would be greatest were the Hellenist Jews and the proselytes to Judaism, among whom the vulgar Greek dialect had very generally become vernacular. The extent to

which the non-Palestinian Jews used the Hellenistic idiom was great; the Septuagint version of the Old Testament, like the books of the New, was composed in it, and in it wrote Philo and Josephus, as well as Paul. But the other Levantine populations also made use of the Hellenistic dialect, which might be called the *lingua franca* of the period. It is this medley of Greek-speaking Levantines, having no connection with the noble Hellenic race except that of their imperfect speech, which the New Testament and other Jewish writers describe as "the Greeks." Christianity, during the first ages, was almost exclusively recruited from among them. Satisfactory proof of this is furnished by the fact that all the extant inscriptions, of date prior to the middle of the third century, which have been found in the Roman catacombs, are in Greek, none being in Latin. ("Palæoromaica;" Lond., 1822.)

Apollos of Alexandria in Egypt, who is mentioned in the Book of the Acts (xviii., 24–28) as an independent preacher of the “things of the Lord” and the “way of the Lord,” and whose doctrine differed in almost nothing from that of Paul, was evidently an Hellenist Jew. Philo-Judæus, likewise of Alexandria, is another instance of a somewhat earlier Hellenist, who may very well be said also to have taught the way of the Lord. In his writings, which date from about 30 to 55 A.D., the entire terminology of Pauline Christianity is to be found, as well as the distinct statement of the Johannine trinity—namely: 1, God the Father; 2, God the Son and Word; 3, God the Holy Spirit—who by indwelling in men makes them first sons of the Word and then sons of God. (Jacob Bryant: “Philo’s Sentiments concerning the Word,” p. 205.)

Proselytes to Judaism, with whom the

Hellenist Jews had much in common, were very numerous in Palestine, Syria, and the Levant generally. That they received with great favour and earnestly embraced the doctrine of Paul is evident from the frequent mention of them in the Book of the Acts. At Jerusalem during the feast of Pentecost there were present Jews and proselytes "out of every nation under heaven." (Acts ii., v., 10.) At Antioch, in Pisidia, "many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul" after the disputation which the Apostle had in the synagogue there. (Acts xiii., 43.) The names of the men who were chosen as a committee to secure for the non-Jewish brethren their fair share of the widows' fund are all Greek, and one Nicolas is specified as a proselyte of Antioch — namely, Antioch in Syria. (Acts vi., 5.) In the latter place indeed, where the brethren were first called Christians, proselytes were particularly

numerous. Josephus relates that there "the Jews constantly made proselytes of a great many of the Greeks, and thereby after a sort brought them to be a portion of their own community" ("Wars," vii., 3, 2); and it may fairly be assumed that the men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who had so much hand in making converts of the Greeks of Antioch, belonged also to that section of society (Acts xi., 20).

The influence under consideration was none the less because it had no other basis than a verbal ambiguity of the nature of a pun; for punning was good agadic logic, and all belonging to those classes were agadists. But it was also truly evangelical: in the play upon the word Peter (Πέτρος) we have an undisguised instance of a Gospel pun, and in what it was intended to inculcate a flagrant example of agadic reasoning. (Matth. xvi., 18.)

The principal emblem of primitive

Christianity, and the one whereof there is the earliest trace—namely, the monogram of Christ—is a sign whose use by Christians was probably promoted by those circumstances. Until quite recently it was very generally supposed that the cross in one form or another had served the primitive Christians as emblem of their faith. But the researches of De Rossi, Le Blant, and others have made it certain that the monogram ✠, composed of Χ and Ρ, which are the two initial letters of both ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ and ΧΡΗΣΤΟΣ, preceded every purely crucial emblem. This was the sign which, as is reported, Constantine adopted and placed on the imperial standard or *labarum*, by divine command, at the time of his conversion to Christianity. The so-called “monogram of Christ,” however, is neither more nor less than the ordinary chrestomathic mark of the ancients, standing for *χρηστός*, “good, excellent,” which it

was customary to put on the margin of manuscripts to indicate noteworthy passages, such passages, when put together in the form of a selection, being called a "chrestomathy." That Constantine should have adopted, as the emblem of *Christ*, a sign which had long previously been in use to denote *chrest* is full of significance. And that significance is enhanced by a fact which indicates the operation of those Egyptian influences that have been above alluded to—namely, that Constantine's conversion was in a great measure due to the representations of an Egyptian: *Δεξαμένου δὲ ῥᾶστα τοῦ Κωνσταντίνου τὸν λόγον καὶ ἀφεμένου μὲν τῶν πατρίων, μετασχόντος δὲ ὧν ὁ Αἰγύπτιος αὐτῷ μετεδίδου.*—Zosimus: "Hist. Nov.," lib. ii., c. 29.

The influence that was exerted by the unwitting transference to Christ of the signification of the word *Chrestos*, "good, excellent, beneficent, gracious,"—

for it means all that, but especially the "goodness of God," τὸ χρηστὸν τοῦ θεοῦ (Rom. ii., 4)—was probably greatly increased by the circumstance that, in like manner, as the aim of Christian morality was the practice of "that which is good" (Rom. ii., 10; xi., 22; xii., 9; xvi., 19; 1 Thess. v., 21; 1 Pet. iii., 13), so "the highest good" (*summum bonum*, χρηστὸν μεγιστὸν,—Cic. De Fin., 5, 6; cf. id. 5, 28, *et passim*) was the ethical objective of devout Pagans, and more particularly of such as were of the Stoic persuasion, among whom χρηστὰ ἦθῃ was a familiar expression. An interesting illustration of the regard entertained for τὸ χρηστὸν, by Pagans and Christians alike, is furnished by the occurrence, in the line from the Greek poet Menander which Paul has quoted in his Epistle to the Corinthians, of that very expression: φθείρουσιν ἦθῃ χρηστὰ ὁμιλίας κακαί (1 Cor. xv., 33).

This meeting of devout men of all sects on the common ground of cultivating τὸ χρηστὸν or τὰ χρηστὰ was, no doubt, what was in the mind of some of the Catholic Fathers when they asserted that "from the time of Christ's coming in the flesh the true religion which had previously existed began to be called Christian": *quousque ipse Christus veniret in carne unde vera religio quæ jam erat cœpit appellari Christiana.* (Augustin. *Retractationum*, xiii., 3. — Cf. Melito *Apol.*, Euseb. *Hist. Eccles.* c. 4, cit.; Clem. Alex. *Strom.*; Lactant. *Div. Inst.*, 7.) It would not, perhaps, be incorrect to say that theretofore it had been virtually Chrestian; although no such word, for reasons which are obvious, was coined or in use in Græco-Roman society till, on account of the circumstances stated above, it came to be applied to the believers in Jesus.

But the fact remains that during the

first four centuries of our era it was the common practice of the Christians to write the name of their Master Chrest or Chreist, and to style themselves *Chrestiani*. That the non-Christian Gentiles were likewise in the habit of putting Chrest for Christ is extremely probable. Indeed, we have proof that this was so in the distorted allusion to Christ which is made by Suetonius: *Judæos impulsore Chresto, assidue tumultuantes Româ expulit.* (Vit. Claud., 25.)

It was not possible that this practice of using in the place of Christ the word Chrest (Χρηστός), consecrated as it was to the expression of the divine goodness in its most devotional aspect, could subsist so extensively without producing a profound impression on men's minds. The result must have been gradually to attach to Christ Jesus all the significance of that word. Evidence of this transformation is not wanting in the Gospels

themselves. In the second Gospel, which by most competent authorities is considered to contain all the primary Gospel matter now extant, there is not to be found, from beginning to end, a single phrase attributing to Jesus any degree whatever of goodness, beneficence, or love; whereas the fourth Gospel, which belongs to a much later generation, is so imbued with those sentiments as to have been called the "Gospel of love." Even in its present form, which as a whole is at most but secondary, the Mark Gospel represents Jesus to have been a dreadful and even dangerous thaumaturge rather than an agent of divine goodness and love. ("Synopticon: An Exposition of the Common Matter of the Synoptic Gospels," by W. G. Rushbrooke; London, 1880.)

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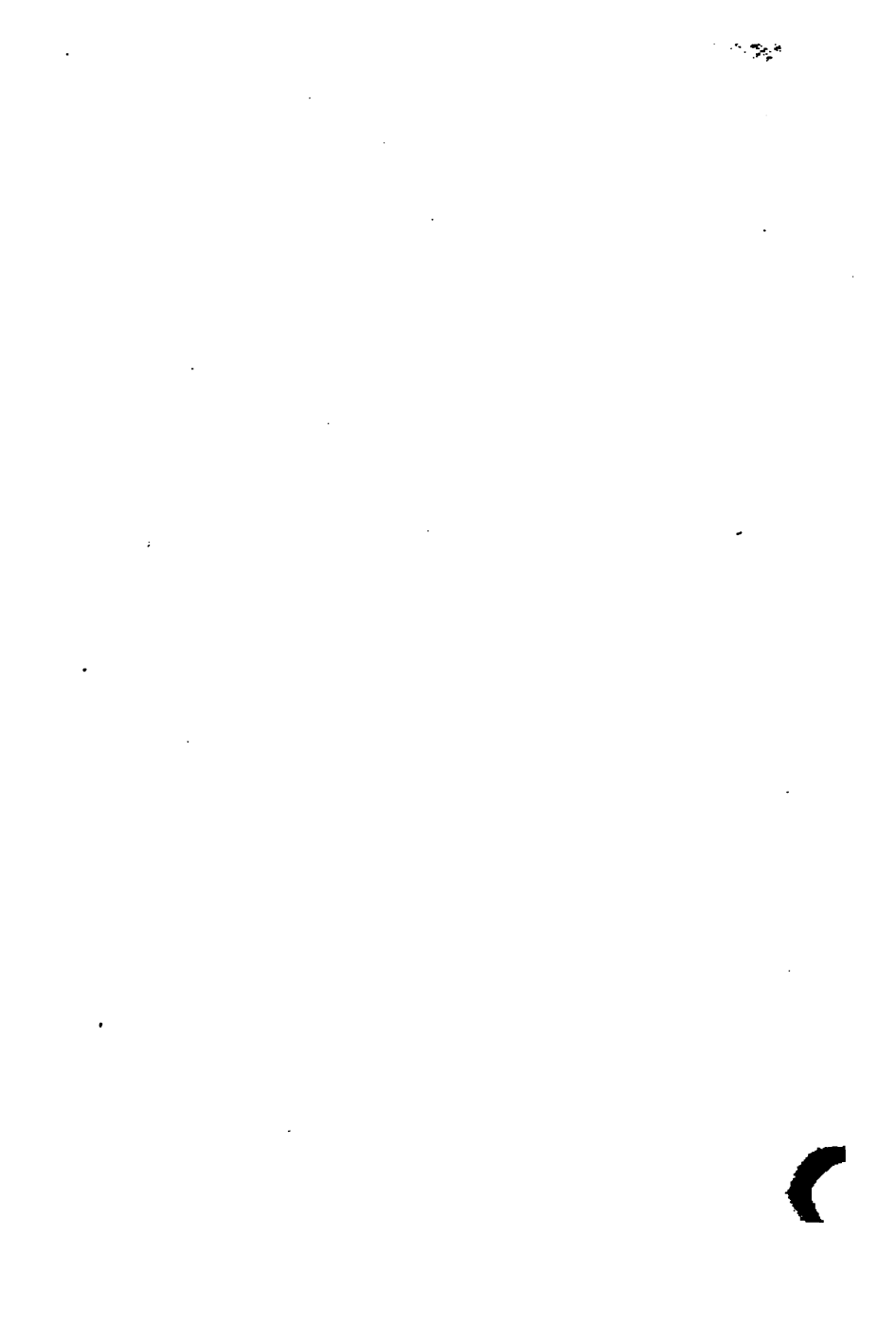
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